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Abstract: Through an intimate discussion of the author's recent drawing practice this essay offers a temporal, spatial and corporeal account of the drawing process. This paper documents an experiential enquiry into the time of drawing, the scope of such a study eloquently captured by Henri Bergson's concept of the body as the "place of passage of movements received and thrown back , a hyphen a connecting link between the things which act on me and the things upon which I act" (Bergson 1929, p.196).

Key words: Time, matter, movement, measurement.

Dialogues in proximity

Examining a temporal spatial and corporeal approach to mark-making, this essay revisits and reflects upon an earlier text by the author entitled *Drawing Near* which was presented at the 'Drawing Out' conference in Melbourne in April 2010.

"I would not be surprised if fifty years from now, almost no one would pay attention to paintings whose subjects remain still in their always too narrow frames"¹ so said the French painter Andre Girard (1901-1968), anticipating the popularity of cinema. Standing in a gallery in 2002 this prediction by Girard, seemed to be playing out in front of me. In the multimedia group show I was attending, the audience's attention was wholly directed towards large digital projections, completely ignoring the neighbouring static drawings, which seemed unable to compete with the innate attraction of the moving image. With an art practice based in drawing, I was both affected and inspired by this experience and the focus of this paper 'Dialogues in Proximity' is the enquiry initiated by this observation, and to track its development through to my current practice

A state of distraction

Walter Benjamin's statement: "the masses seek distraction whereas art demands concentration from the spectator" (Benjamin, 1970, p.241) seemed a fitting description for the plight of drawings unable to arrest the gaze of an audience in the face of flickering lights and sound-bites. What, for drawing, were the ramifications of this distracted state of viewing? As Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and Rick Robinson write in *The Art of Seeing an Interpretation of the Aesthetic Encounter*, for a viewer to have a meaningful encounter with a work *time* is a crucial factor. They state; "it's not a blast, it's a dialogue ... if you just walk by a painting you're not going to get anything out of it, anything at all, seeing takes time" (Csikszentmihalyi, Robinson, 1990, p.144). Further reading around the *time* of viewing of the art object, highlighted a disparity: a wealth of texts covered the relationship between artwork and audience and the time and conditions of this encounter, but few examined the relationship between artist and artwork. A perceived lack of critical analysis concerning the effect of time on the artist has led to this examination of the relationship between time and drawing, or more precisely: how time is manifested in mark-making.

Time Embodied

To ascertain and experience the effect time had on the psyche of the artist, the type of line produced and the final drawn outcome, I set about executing a series of timed figural sketches. I took the figurative approach for two reasons: first the demands of life drawing keep one attuned to the present moment and constantly attentive to the weight, direction, angle, position and speed of the unfolding line. Why the presence of a figure always imbues the drawing session with a certain sense of urgency intrigues me. In these timed sketches, the figure as subject

¹ Girard (cited in McLuhan, 1964, p.128)

matter is for me no more than an object through which the temporality of mark-making can be examined; yet the figure as live model always exerts a force felt far more keenly than (in comparison) a still-life or a landscape.



Lisa Munnelly, *Series of timed sketches*, 2002. Digital Video stills .

Second, the breakdown and apportioning of time is a key constituent of any life drawing session. Generally drawing classes start off with quick sketches, strategic warm-ups (artistic equivalents of leg stretches and star-jumps) which aim to get one loosened up and looking attentively once the longer sittings commence. I knew from experience that these sections of time, as markers, were far from neutral – as each imprints its own signature upon the work it frames. Having executed five sketches ranging from five to forty minutes, all of the same subject in the same pose, I observed that:

The one-minute sketch was straight forward, pure action with little or no dilemma. In contrast, the pressure demanded by the forty minute drawing was rather like being lost: one step back for every step forward, uncertainty about where to go next, increased awareness of one-self and of one's surroundings, constantly returning to known landmarks for re-orientation. As the time increased marks became tighter, less expressive, more all-over, and during the course of forty minutes the drawing started to appear overworked, and an attempt to rectify this by erasing marks failed, as the charcoal impregnated surface of my paper could not be returned back to its initial state.

(Munnelly, 2003, p.7)



Lisa Munnelly, *Series of timed sketches*, 2002. Compressed charcoal.A1 format

These figurative time-trials proved to be an effective tool in measuring the effect of duration upon drawing, both experientially and as a visual record. Representation of the nude figure, however, is loaded with issues concerning gender, the gaze: the politics of representation. I could not see a way of addressing these without distracting from the primary focus of my enquiry; to explore the temporality of drawing.

Past and Present Tense

In transitioning from a figurative to a process based drawing practice, a key reference of mine is the work of the late German Philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002). Gadamer defined the experience of an encounter with the art object through using the analogy of conversation;

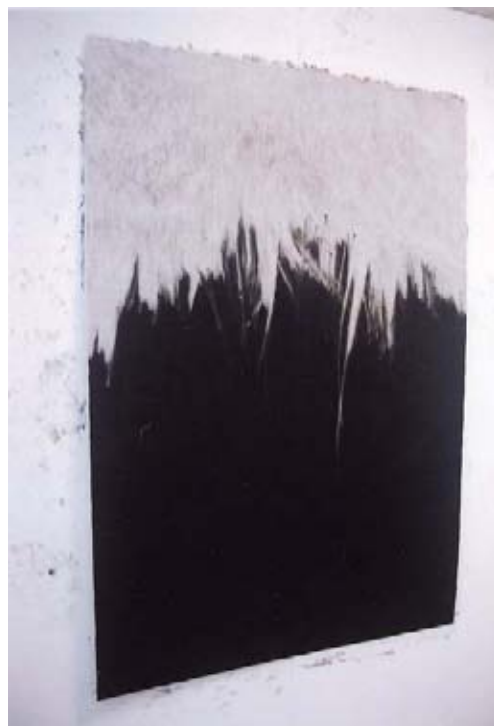
An experience of art is like this: it is not a mere copy of something. Rather one is absorbed in it. It is more like a tarrying that waits and preserves in such a way that the work of art is allowed to come forth than it is like something we have done. Again, we can listen to language: we can say that what comes forth 'addresses us,' and so the person who is addressed is as if in a conversation with what comes forth. It holds with seeing an artwork as well as with listening to or reading such a work that one tarries with the work of art. To tarry is not to lose time. Being in the mode of tarrying is an intensive back and forth conversation that is not cut off but lasts until it is ended. The whole of it is a conversation in which for a time one is completely 'absorbed in conversation,' and this means one 'is completely there in it.'

(Gadamer, 2007, p. 211)

In a brief biography of Gadamer, Nicholas Davey eloquently summarises the philosopher's concept of art as conversation. Davey explains how the "thrust of Gadamer's metaphor is that art 'speaks' to us in the way that language 'speaks' to us ; that is as a 'dialogical event'" (Davey, 2003, p.133). Drawing as event, drawing which engenders and embraces the unforeseen differs radically from the definition of drawing as representation, where marks are made on paper to accurately record the subject and/or visualise an artist's pre-existing idea. Following on from this distinction, Davey explains Gadamer's preference for the term 'presentation' as opposed to 'representation' in regards to art; "Representation suggests an interpretation dependent upon a prior truth, whilst presentation speaks of a coming-forth of a subject" (Davey, 2003, p.131). This concept of presentation he furthers, means that "art is no longer subordinate to its conceptual subject but becomes a vehicle of its sensuous experience" (Davey, 2003, p.131).



Munnelly *Figure study* 2002.
charcoal on board



Munnelly. *Saturation study*
2002.charcoal on board.

If we consider Davey's summation that "representation suggests an interpretation dependent upon a prior truth whilst presentation speaks of a coming forth of a subject" (Davey, 2003, p.131), it becomes apparent that within these two terms a distinction of time is made. Through a differentiation between the past time of representation and the 'present-ness' of presentation, I realized that any attempts to accurately 'represent' time through drawing would fail, and the question then became: is it possible to *present* the elusive quality of time through drawing?

Surface and Saturation

The answer to this dilemma: how to present time without resorting to figurative means, lay in the very work I was struggling with. From the thwarted attempts to erase areas of the forty-minute charcoal impregnated drawing a new awareness of surface and saturation emerges, generating a fresh investigative imperative: exactly how much charcoal can be loaded onto the paper? In a desire to completely cover the surface, the gestural sweeps and dashes of life drawing are abandoned, and replaced by a field of small firm marks. About eight hours and twenty charcoal sticks later my desire was realized. The outcome was as envisaged, a large black board. However, it was the unexpected material nuances generated by the process that now fired my imagination anew. What I was faced with was not the featureless flat black board I'd seen in my minds eye, but a deep velvety expanse, the endpoint of each meticulous mark seeming to catch the light like the wing of some great black moth. I was struck by how a work so dense and immensely black responded so readily to light. The French art historian Henri Focillon (1881-1943) would rightly assert that this work 'depends' on light. Of all art he writes:

...they depend on light- on the light that models them, that brings out the solids or the voids, and that makes the surface the expression of a relative density. Now light itself depends upon the substance which receives it. Upon this substance light may flow easily or come firmly to rest, it may to a greater or lesser degree penetrate it...

(Focillon 1948, p.35)



Lisa Munnelly, *Motherboard* (detail) 2003. Compressed charcoal on matte board. 3 x 1.5 metres

Genesis or Gestation

I retrospectively titled this charcoal drawing *Mother Board* due to both its capacity to relay information (the mother board in a computer is a circuit board through which all signals are directed) and its generative properties, as it was from this work that all subsequent drawings which were to form the exhibition titled *The Aesthetics of Immersion* (Munnelly, Nov 2003) came into being. However; once attributed, this title begged the question: What does it mean to say that a large charcoal drawing begat a whole series of subsequent works, and what is the nature of such a birth?

The material led nature of the *Aesthetics of Immersion* work lies at odds with a Dualist philosophy which asserts that it is purely from divine or intellectual inspirations that creation issues forth. From this perspective the creation of the artwork simulates the Biblical moment of Genesis; in the beginning the "earth was formless and desolate" (The Bible Societies, 1976, p.4) and things only took form upon the commandment *let there be light*. Whether pictured as a lit bulb hovering overhead, or spoken as in an illuminating discussion, light is a popular and commonplace metaphor for describing the moment of creation, inspiration or cognition. The belief that the artist is *illuminated* by some kind of transcendental vision is also commonplace and behind the artist Caspar David Friedrich's (1774-1840) instruction when he states: "Close your bodily eye, so that you may see your picture first with your spiritual eye- then bring to the light of day that which you have seen in darkness so that it may react on others from the outside inwards" (Friedrich cited in Chilvers, 1998, p.187).

Fredrich's directive: to close one's eyes to all external matter so as to best focus on an inner vision, lies in stark contrast to Gadamer's philosophy of presentation, where in waiting for the creative principle *of art* to emerge *through art*, ones' eyes must surely be kept open. Gadamer's call to consider how art might be a vehicle of its own sensuous experience is however, more than just a call for one to keep one's eyes open, as the term 'sensuous' implies engaging *all* the senses: vision, hearing, taste, smell and touch. So it seems that while one philosophy relies on the suppression of the senses, and of all the ambient 'noise' in the physical environ that would distract from the divine message, the other philosophy relies upon an opening to the immediate physical environ, indeed relies upon sensorial feedback from it in order for inspiration to issue forth.

Gone to ground

Caspar David Friedrich is considered a pioneer in Early German Romanticism for his depiction of vast and often bleak landscapes which dwarf the human figure (usually placed in the foreground of the paintings). Ideally, the viewer of the painting is to visualise themselves as the lone figure represented, and so experience the sublime majesty of nature for themselves. In an article entitled 'The Friedrich Factor' (*Contemporary Visual Arts*, issue 19, pp. 26-33) Simon Morley



examines a number of contemporary artists whose works directly or indirectly engage Friedrich's legacy. Morley states that "Friedrich's paintings picture the liminal state—the individual poised on the boundary between finite and infinite" (Morley, p.28). He explains how the German Romantic movement aimed to dissolve the subject – object division which kept the individual from nature/ God, "to be replaced by an intimation of transcendental oneness" (Morley, p.28), and that this state of transcendence was to be achieved through a state of contemplation. Yet as the British painter Edwina Leapman states in the same article—"the trouble with Friedrich is that he puts figures in the way of the boundless expanses of his landscapes". (Leapman, cited in Morley, p. 29)

Caspar David Friedrich.
Wanderer above a sea of fog. 1815. Oil on canvas

This criticism of form blocking the view and hence obstructing the sublime experience is discussed further in a paper by Thomas Mc Evilly entitled *Seeking the Primal Through Paint: The Monochrome Icon*. He writes how the confrontation of an individual person with the infinite sublime (the climax of the Romantic Heroic adventure) was, from the standpoint of the body, not without danger: as "the desire to vacate ones selfhood involves abandoning the body and annihilates the finite" (Mc Evilly, 1996, p. 48) Mc Evilly explains how "the fascination with the sublime progressively ate away at the figure and hypostasised the active ground. In the twentieth century it devolved finally in the monochrome surface, the pure ground into which all figures had dissolved" (Mc Evilly, 1996, p. 49).

Dialogue

The discussion of Friedrich's work and the larger shift of a Romantic Sublime into an Abstract Sublime, holds interest to me, as this shift echoes the development or

perhaps devolvement (depending upon your perspective) of my figure studies' absorption into the ground of my drawings. The realisation that this direction in my work: of the figure gone to ground, closely resembled a movement away from figuration at the beginning of last century, I believe enacts Gadamer's description of art as a dialogical event. Gadamer identifies the work of art as an assertion "because in what it says it is equally unfolding things and at the same time holding them back in readiness. The assertion it makes will speak over and over again" (Gadamer, 2007, p.212). By nature the act of folding is implicit in the act of unfolding and vice-versa. The act of folding brings into contact aspects previously separated, hence as my project unfolds - I find myself folded into new and unforeseen territories and topics. Davey summarises how Gadamer's analogy of conversation extends further than between audience and artwork, or artist and artwork. Gadamer he explains, labels the *entire* art historical conversation as an ever evolving conversation, this concept stresses its participatory nature, with the participants keeping the conversation in play: "Speaker and conversation, artist and subject matter are each ontologically dependent on the other to spring forth" (Davey, 2003, p.134). What is so liberating in Gadamer's art as conversation philosophy, is the opportunity for the artist to participate, as in a conversation, if there is closure on an artistic movement it can never be said to be final, no one can claim to have had the last word.

"I am simply making the last paintings which can ever be made"²
Ad Reinhardt (1913-1967)

The Fullness of Emptiness

Following on from how a fascination with the sublime dissolved the figure and substantialized the ground, Mc Evilly cites the reductionism of Ad Reinhardt's work, opining that (after Yves Klein) Ad Reinhardt is the artist "whose work most uncompromisingly and persistently embodies the monochrome idea" (McEvilly, 1996, p.75). Moving from multi coloured rectangles, into red and blue monochromes before going (and staying until his death) with black in 1955, Reinhardt's gradual chromatic reductionism reflected his interest in emptiness, in the void. On the Monochrome style Reinhardt writes "The fine artist should have a fine mind free of all passions.." (Reinhardt cited in Mc Evilly, p. 77). Mc Evilly likens such sentiments to the art of mediation;

"As the yogi attains the state of pure consciousness" (through Patanjali yoga Sutras)
"The cessation of the surface fluctuations in the mind, so the painter will attain to the visual analogue of pure consciousness by erasing the surface fluctuations of line and colour from the painting. The stripped canvas is an analogue of the opened mind" (Mc Evilly, 1996, p.55).

Viewers of the process involved in creating the large charcoal wall drawings in the *Motherboard* series, note the repetitive aspect of the mark-making, and often ask if my process relates to tantric drawing - *am I purposefully employing repetition of mark as a meditative device?* The reality is that far from inducing a dream-like state or a higher plane, the physical demands of the repetitive act in this type of drawing fixes the drawer in place (in front of the picture plane) and fixes them in time (in the present moment). A marathon instead of a meditation, the constant physical feedback from the body demands constant adjustment in front of the drawing surface.

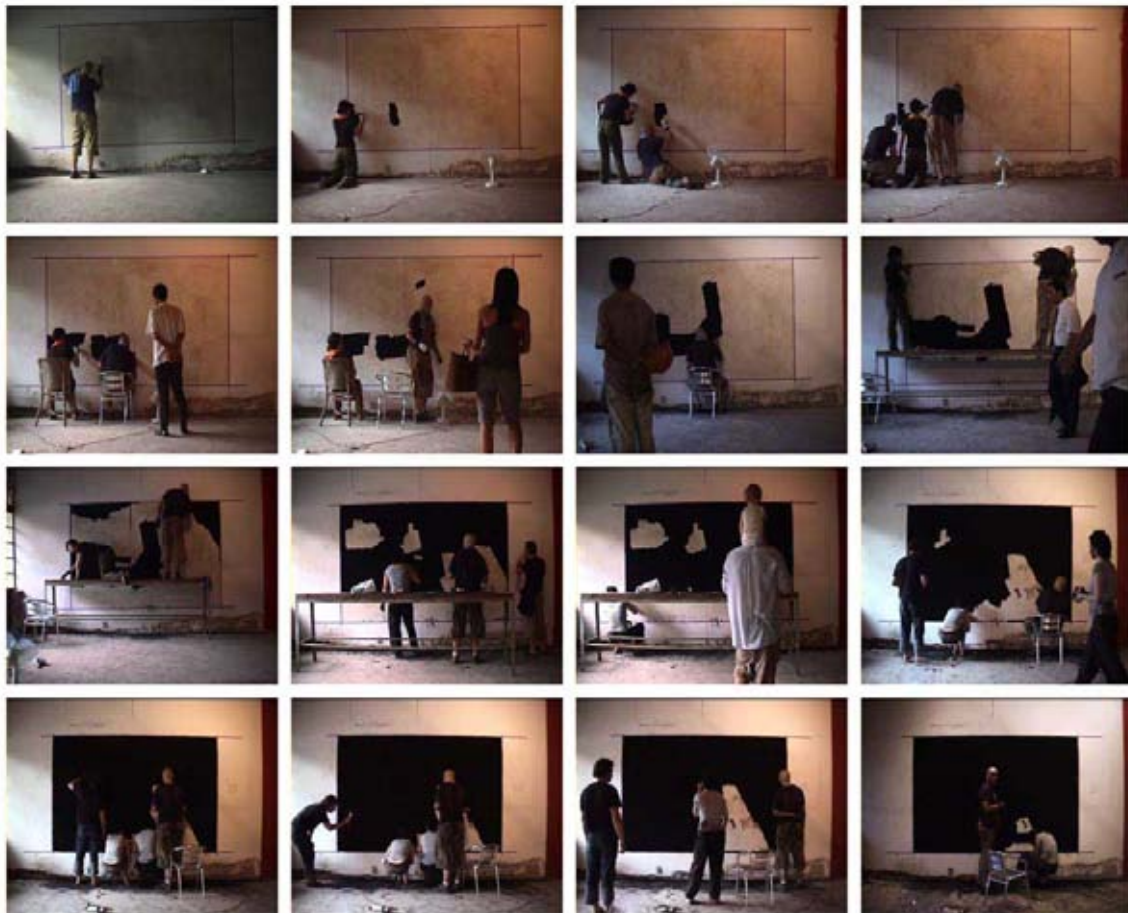
² (cited in McEvilly, 1996, p. 75)



Lisa Munnely. *The Fullness of Emptiness*(2003) Charcoal drop captured on digital video loop (stills from)

The Long Night

Initially when questioned as to why such large scale in my charcoal wall drawings, my response was, that in dealing with time I needed lengthy duration, this in turn was countered with "why, why not brief duration?" It then dawned on me that through exertion and extended duration what I was doing was *inhabiting* the work, and the larger the scale - the longer I had alongside it or in it. I was depending upon thought to emerge through an *immersion* in time *and* matter. Perhaps the term 'emerge' is misleading as it suggests a slow burgeoning of awareness yet rather paradoxically (given such protracted processes) cognition of / through the work is sudden and best described by the French physicist Henri Poincaré (1854-1912) who wrote "*Thought is only a flash between two long nights but this flash is everything...*"(Poincaré cited in Newman, 2003, p.68)



Lisa Munnelly, *Motherboard 2*. Digital video stills. SATELLITE 2006: Shanghai, China

It seems then, that I share with the transcendental monochrome an interest in the potential of space, in my case the intentional use of large scale so as to make a space- physically conceptually and temporally in which I could occupy and be with my work, perhaps best described as 'tarrying' with the work (credit to Gadamer) . As outlined my practice is far too physical for this space to be considered as a pursuit of absolute purity as per the metaphysical aspirations of the monochrome. Quite the opposite, Poincaré's flash in the long night -for me occurs through friction, the spark of cognition here is created through two things- movement and material.

Signature

With the material – led nature of my art practice another key reference has been the writings of Henri Focillon (whose poetic account on the interdependence of light and surface I quoted earlier). Focillon's keen interest in the relationship between the artist and their material was engendered by the childhood experience of his father's studio: Victor Focillon (an artist and engraver). On the tools in his father's studio he writes " Warm with humanity and bright with use, they were in my eyes not inanimate instruments but forms endowed with life, not the curious apparatus of a laboratory but powers of magical sophistication" (Focillon, cited in Gajewski-Kennedy, 2003, p. 108)). In his book *The Life of Forms in Art*, Focillon defined his views on the role of material and process in creative practice. On the affect of matter (Focillon, 1948, p.32), he asserts how there is a 'constant', 'indissoluble' and 'irreducible' union between form and matter and warns against viewing form as "some superior principle modelling a passive mass" (ibid), for he states, "it is plainly observable how matter imposes its own form upon form" (ibid). To apply Focillon's statement directly; the tools we use in drawing do not act as neutral vehicles, work inevitably is imprinted with the signature of the tool that made it. I relate this fact back to Gadamer's description of art as a *vehicle* of its sensuous experience.



Lisa Munnely, (2003).
Documentation of fallen dust - drawing residue.

Vehicles (planes, trains, bikes, cars, boats, feet, etc) transport us from A to B. Experience tells us that even though the coordinates of A & B may be the same, what we see, feel, learn, (and what state we arrive in) depends entirely upon the rituals and rhythms particular to each mode of transport. In retrospect Focillon's observation (ibid) that "all different kinds of matter are subject to a certain destiny", mirrors my experience with the *Aesthetics of Immersion* series of drawings. With charcoal as my vehicle, sights and scenes particular only to it or *through* it were witnessed along the way. Vistas of surface and saturation, graduated into views on angles and light, which then dispersed, descended, enveloped and finally settled in space.

Focillon elaborates upon his assertion that all matter is subject to a certain destiny by stating that all matter has form, and that form ' evokes, suggests and propagates other forms' (ibid). I would like to add to this an emphasis upon embodiment- as it is not only via the charcoal in the drawings of the *Aesthetics of Immersion* series that "form liberates other form according to its own laws" (ibid) but use of the body too "secures certain effects" (ibid). Added to the discovery of how charcoal reacted to light and dispersed, descended, enveloped and settled in space was the unforeseen and unintentional signature of the drawing body. The demands imposed by the scale of the *Motherboard* (3 X 2 metres) meant that whilst drawing I had to constantly rearrange my body and continually change hands and angles of approach when fatigue set in.

Movements caused by the scale of the work, imposed an unforeseen structure on the work, and as discussed earlier what eventuated was that a flat black work (in the minds' eye) emerged to become a work embracing pattern and light.



Image Credit: Stephen Metherell
 Lisa Munnelly, *Motherboard* 2010. In 'Draft' Melbourne (Detail)

The touch... 'represents a single moment, in which the tool awakens form in the substance...'

'Touch is structure. It imposes upon the form of the animate being or the object its own form, which is not merely value and colour, but also ...weight density and motion.'

(Focillon 1948, p.39)

Mining the Surface

Why is it that when standing in front of the expansive face of *Motherboard* I feel it is somehow humming - has acquired a life of its own, that somehow I have unlocked the essence of the material? Why is it, that the material in this form has acquired a particular resonance that was not present in the stick of charcoal that I previously held in my hand? In answer to this question Focillon would reason that there has been a divorce between the charcoal stick that I hold and the charcoal drawing that I face on the wall: "the wood of the statue is no longer the wood of the tree, sculptured marble is no longer the marble of the quarry; melted and hammered gold becomes an altogether new and different material; bricks that have been baked and then built into a wall bear no relation to the clay of the clay-pit" (Focillon, 1948, p.33). My usage of the term 'unlocked' in an attempt to identify what has transpired over the drawing process, suggests a reveal of sorts and is a sentiment more eloquently voiced by Focillon's account: "things without a surface, whether once hidden behind the bark, buried in the mountain imprisoned in the nugget or swallowed in the mud, have become wholly separated from chaos. They have acquired an integument they adhere to space they welcome a daylight that works freely upon them" (Focillon, 1948, p.33). Considering that the term 'integument' means a skin or surface covering, the progression of a compressed stick of charcoal into that of a light activated surface, is accurately captured in Focillon's statement.



Lisa Munnely *Motherboard* (and Stephen) at end of day 1 in a 3 day install)
SATELLITE2006 Shanghai, China.

The Unity of Opposites

In documenting my enquiry into the temporal and generative elements of drawing, this text has discussed the definition of, and difference between, representation and presentation as introduced by Gadamer. However it must be acknowledged that with such binary pairings there is always an inherent prejudice. My preference (if it hasn't been clear throughout the text) has been for the concept of 'presentation' with a good deal of this essay being dedicated to exposing how it was only through work, that *the work presented* itself. But to reduce the creative act to an either/or statement, to champion either mind or matter oversimplifies a much more complex relationship and overlooks the vital aspect of *movement* between the two poles and the capacity of transformation. Rob Sewell in a text entitled; *The Unity of Opposites* (Sewell 2002) defines movement as a paradox, motion he explains in "being in one place and another at the same time. is a unity of opposites" (Sewell 2002). In recognition of how two contradictory or opposite considerations may both be true, I realize in hindsight, how I am repeatedly drawn to such extremes. Preferable to having to pick 'a side' then, is the ability to visualise such oppositions as the X and Y axis of a chart, the coordinates of which, map out the theoretical space of my drawing practice:

Representation	-	Presentation
Past	-	Present
Figure	-	Ground
Surface	-	Saturation
Dark	-	Light
Genesis	-	Gestation
Economy	-	Excess
Motion	-	Stasis
Mind	-	Matter

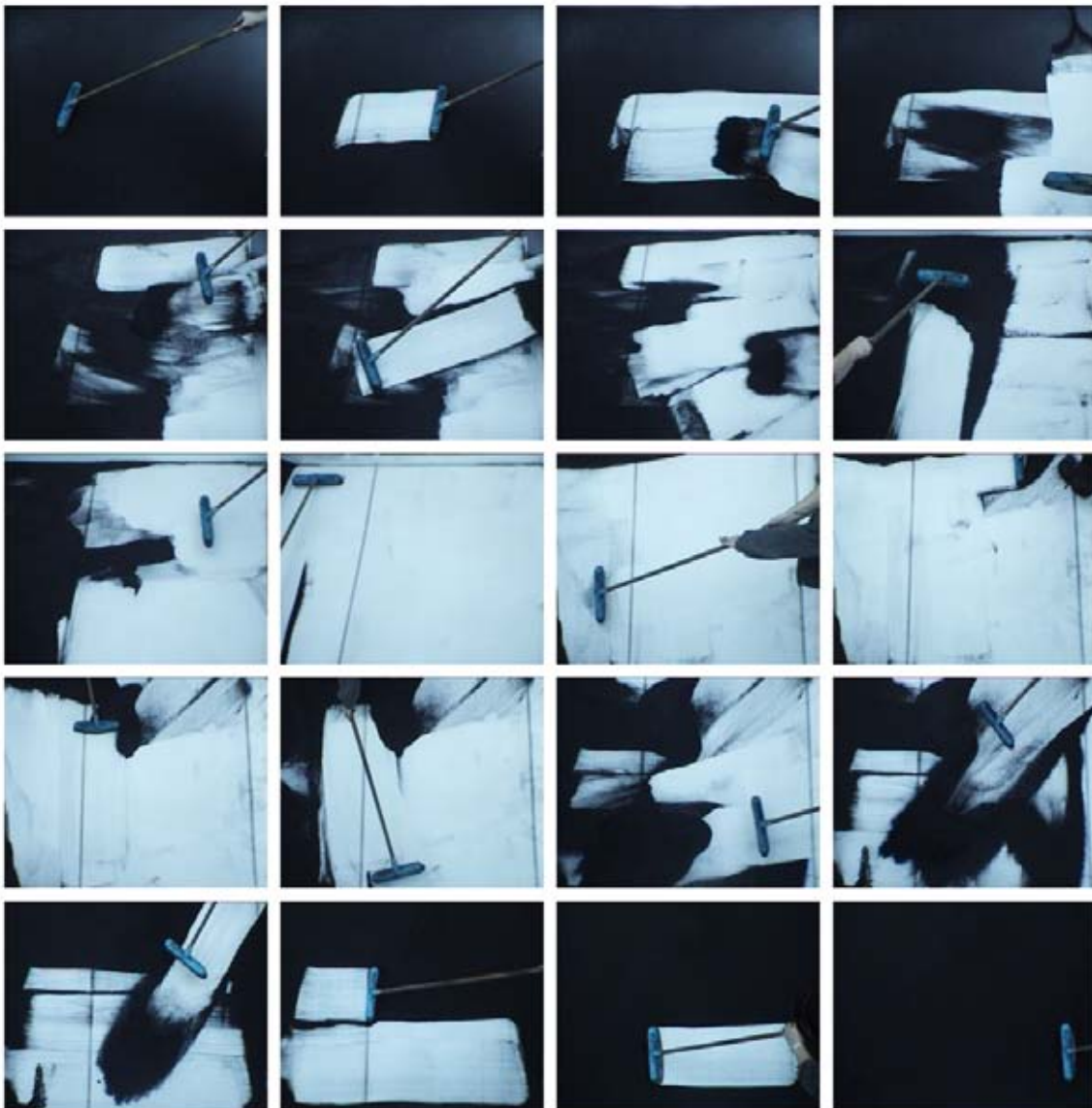


Image Credit Andrew Tetzlaff

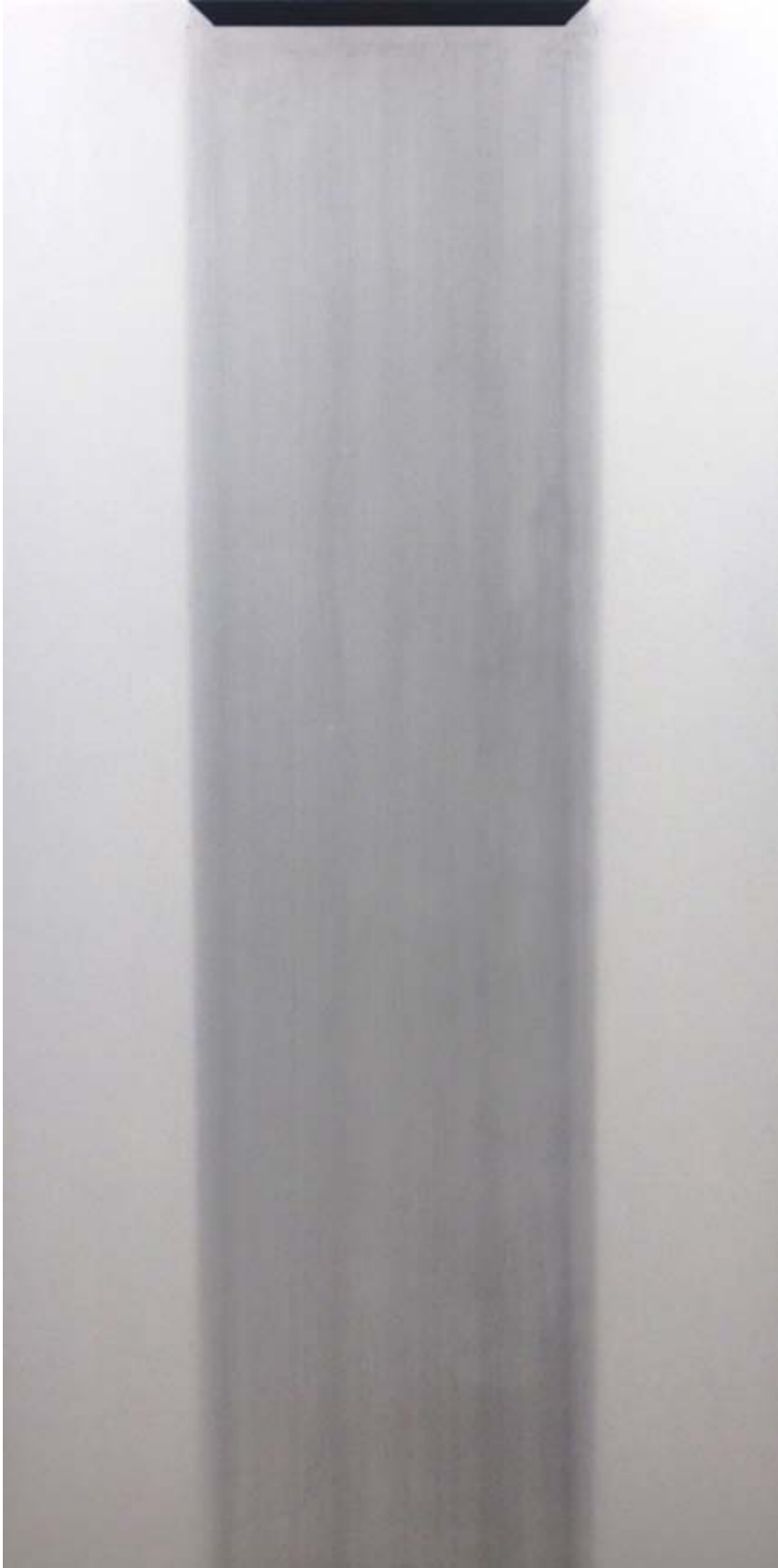
Lisa Munnely. *Motherboard* wall drawing Compressed Charcoal. First Site Gallery RMIT. Melbourne.

It is the space between these oppositions that my practice navigates and plays out., According to Sewall that “things turn into their opposites- cause can become effect and effect can become cause- [is] because they are merely links in a never ending chain in the development of matter” (Sewall, 2002). Perhaps this goes some way to explain why my work finds itself so fully where it is not.

There are many names to describe the instant of cognition, the aesthetic experience, the eureka moment, but whatever you name it – it is metamorphosis, it is when the formless takes on form ,ideas develop, surfaces excavated and darkness is illuminated- it is knowledge embodied. I conclude with the philosopher Henri Bergson’s concept of the body as the “place of passage of the movements received and thrown back, a hyphen, a connecting link between the things which act on me and the things upon which I act”, (Bergson,1929, p.196) as it is a statement that eloquently captures both the corporeal and cerebral experience of drawing where the body is governed by a triumvirate of movement, cognition and material.



Lisa Munnally, *Sweeping Vistas*. (2003) Digital video loop (stills)



Lisa Munnely, *Descent*. 2010. Compressed charcoal on Board. 2.44 x 1.22 m

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